Alive at the Core

Exemplary Approaches to General Education in the Humanities

Michael Nelson

Chapter One: Alive at the Core: Programs and Issues Michael Nelson

At King's College, the general education program in the humanities, Foundation Year Programme, is for freshmen only, as its name implies. At Eckerd, the program begins with the entering class but culminates in a senior capstone course, Quest for Meaning. The University of North Carolina at Asheville's Humanities Program is required of all students; indeed, it is the campus's flagship program. At Davidson College, the Humanities Program (Humes) is an option for fulfilling distribution requirements that is now available to less than one-fourth of the freshman class.

Almost every humanities program mixes lectures with discussions, but at Columbia University, lectures are expressly forbidden in Masterpieces of Western Literature (Lit. Hum.). Millsaps College requires that students in its Heritage program attend off-campus artistic and cultural events, and at St. John's College, students not only study music as part of the core curriculum but also sing. Rhodes College initially included music and art in its Search course but quickly abandoned them for the sake of closer study of written works. Temple University's Intellectual Heritage (IH) program does not shy away from its original conception as a great books course; instead, it unabashedly urges students to "think in agreement" with each work as they read it, relying on subsequent primary texts to supply differing perspectives. The University of the South's contrasting approach is embodied in the name of its program: Tradition and Criticism in Western Culture. At Stanford University, every course in the IHUM program (Introduction to the Humanities) is required to have at least one "noncanonical" work on the syllabus.

The four-year curriculum at St. John's is entirely Western, the college's main justification being that the West has been the wellspring of modern science, philosophy, and liberalism. At Hendrix College, each unit of Western Intellectual Traditions includes study of a corresponding non-Western culture: ancient Greece with Persia, seventeenth-century Europe with Africa, and so on. Most programs are comprehensively chronological, but the Experimental College Program at the University of California at Berkeley focused on just four periods, ranging from fifth-century Greece to the contemporary United States. Although the founding vision of many general education programs in the humanities included close study of the Bible, at Columbia the Bible was left out deliberately until late in the history of the core curriculum

Some of the differences among the humanities programs represented in this book were matters of original design. Others have come about through continuing innovation in the face of new challenges, insights, and opportunities. Rhodes's Search course, for example, directly influenced the creation of humanities programs at several other colleges, including Davidson, Eckerd, Millsaps, and the University of the South. Yet its fifty-five-year history has been marked by frequent innovations, such as a smorgasbord of week-long special-topics seminars by individual instructors that happily interrupts the otherwise lockstep progress of the course's first year, and a "track" system for sophomores that enables them to leaven the common syllabus with a particular emphasis

on literature, philosophy, religion, history, or politics.

General education in the humanities, as practiced today in American higher education, is clearly marked by great variety. Yet all, or nearly all, of these programs share certain vital characteristics. The most important of these is the premise that college students, before becoming immersed in their major subjects, should participate in a multiterm program that spurs them to reflect from a variety of perspectives on the great issues that have occupied humankind, especially in the West, through all of history. Some label this kind of program multidisciplinary, and others call it interdisciplinary or nondisciplinary. The idea in all cases is to transcend the specialized approach to knowledge that will characterize students' later studies as advanced undergraduates and graduate students.

All of the programs that are represented in this book agree that college students should be guided in their general education by faculty members from a variety of disciplines, sometimes reaching beyond the humanities into the natural and social sciences. None of these faculty docents, of course, will be expert in every aspect of the course. Perhaps for this reason, the faculty of each program gathers regularly during the academic year, the summer, or both to plan and discuss the assigned works. A consensus also exists on the centrality of primary texts as the main, and in some cases the exclusive, source of reading assignments. Finally, although one could imagine a general education program in the humanities that was organized around issues such as justice and order, some form of chronological organization is the nearly universal practice.

The Programs

Columbia's core curriculum is the grandmother of general education in the humanities. Its two-semester Introduction to Contemporary Civilization course (CC), which entered the curriculum in 1919, was the first tangible expression of the then-popular great books movement. This movement, whose leaders were Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler of the University of Chicago, Alexander Meiklejohn of the University of Wisconsin, Stringfellow Barr of the University of Virginia, and Columbia's own John Erskine, was born in reaction to the segmentation and specialization of the undergraduate curriculum that characterized the increasingly common free electives system of higher education. Columbia added another year-long great books course, Masterpieces of Western Literature (Lit. Hum.) to its core in 1937, followed a decade later by Masterpieces of Western Art and Masterpieces of Western Music, each of them a semester course. For nearly a century, all Columbia freshmen and sophomores have met in small classes to discuss important works from the Western tradition with a faculty member (or, increasingly, an advanced graduate student) from one of the humanities departments.

Great books education has constituted the entire curriculum of St. John's College since 1937, when Stringfellow Barr became president. The heart of the curriculum is the seminar, a twice-weekly gathering of students that meets all four years for the purpose of discussing landmark Western writings. Each seminar consists of eighteen students and is led by two faculty members. In addition, all students spend four years studying Greek, French, and English in the language tutorial; four years working their way chronologically from Euclid to Einstein in the mathematics tutorial; and three years studying the historical progression of the sciences in the laboratory. The two-year music tutorial combines singing with musical elements from the other tutorials, such as rhetoric, poetry, number, and ratio. St. John's has no departments, and every faculty member teaches throughout the curriculum.

Rhodes College, previously known as Southwestern at Memphis, inaugurated its twelve-credit Search course in 1945. Influenced by the great books movement, President Charles

Diehl decried the national trend toward specialization in undergraduate education and regarded a common, nondisciplinary grounding in the humanities as an essential part of a college education. Departing from that avowedly secular movement, Diehl also believed that scholarly study of the Bible was an essential part of such an education. Thus, the avowed purpose of The Search for Values in the Light of Western History and Religion (known until 1986 as Man in the Light of History and Religion) was to "recover the understanding, exemplified by Socrates' 'Know thyself' and Jesus' 'Perfect thyself,' that man is a rational animal with a spark of the divine in him." The Search course today, which a majority of Rhodes freshmen and sophomores take, is a discussion-based survey of primary texts of Western literature, history, religion, philosophy, and politics from the ancient world to the present. Its faculty in recent years has been drawn from fourteen departments, several of them outside the humanities.

An interdisciplinary core curriculum that extended over four years and was focused on values questions was part of the founding vision of Eckerd College (né Florida Presbyterian College) in 1960. The foundation course in the program was a required two-year sequence, Western Civilization and Its Christian Heritage, which combined lectures and discussions, was chronologically organized and based on primary texts, and merged the social and natural sciences with the humanities. The name of today's one-year freshman version of the course--Western Heritage in a Global Context--indicates its shift in thematic emphasis from Christianity to a mixture of Western and non-Western topics. Although Eckerd's curriculum now allows students more opportunity to specialize in a major than was the case when the college was founded, seniors still must take the values-focused Quest for Meaning capstone course.

Davidson College's Humanities (Humes) Program was founded in 1962 by Daniel Rhodes, who had been recruited from Rhodes College to introduce a version of the Search course to the Davidson curriculum. Like the Search course, Humes integrated biblical study into a great books program and offered students an alternative way of satisfying several distribution requirements in the humanities. The program has changed very little over the years, and although it remains popular with students and administrators, most faculty members in the college's humanities departments now dislike it. Their objections range from hostility to having aspects of their subjects taught by nonspecialists to a postmodern disdain for the course's assumption, largely unaltered over the years, that an organic narrative unity underlies the Western tradition.

The Humanities Program at the University of North Carolina at Asheville was created in 1964. Originally a chronologically organized, four-course, great books sequence required of freshmen and sophomores, the program now extends across all four years and, although it is still grounded in primary texts, has adopted a more critical and cross-cultural approach to the Western experience. In addition, the program includes an "Arts and Ideas" course that involves music, art, drama, and creative writing and pays more attention to the natural and social sciences. A mix of lectures and discussions, the Humanities Program draws on faculty from a wide range of departments.

In 1965, under the leadership of Joseph Tussman, a student of Meiklejohn, the University of California at Berkeley launched the Experimental College Program, which constituted nearly the entire freshman and sophomore curriculum for the students who elected to take it. A semester each was devoted to fifth-century Greece, seventeenth-century England, Federalist America, and contemporary America in a thematic study of the challenges confronting democracy. Frequent lectures, discussions, and tutorials took the place of normal courses. Inadequate faculty and administration support doomed the experiment after four years, however. Members of the Berkeley faculty were unwilling to forsake their departments to devote themselves to Tussman's program, and the administration would not authorize him to offer permanent positions to prospective

faculty members from elsewhere.

Millsaps College's Cultural Heritage of the West program was created in 1968. It was modeled on Rhodes College's Search course but placed additional emphasis on music and art. The Heritage program, a year-long course that meets for seven hours each week, provides students an alternative means to fulfill several distribution requirements. It combines lectures and discussions with cocurricular cultural events. In 1992 the program was renamed Heritage of the West in a World Perspective to reflect its new "global and multicultural perspective."

The Foundation Year Programme at King's College was founded in 1972 at a time when the college was in danger of being absorbed by Dalhousie University. An unusual faculty alliance of "traditionalists," whose main concern was to introduce a great books program into the curriculum, and "radicals," who wanted to create a distinct identity for King's that would enable it to fend off the Dalhousie "megaversity," formed to create Foundation Year. The program's avowed purpose is to overcome "the fragmentation of knowledge of the contemporary university curriculum." It provides the entire course of study for freshmen at King's, proceeding chronologically from the ancient world to the modern West and relying on lectures, discussions, and common reading of primary works. Traditionalists and radicals still contend over whether the program's overarching narrative should be Hegelian or Marxist.

Temple University created the Intellectual Heritage Program in 1979 as a required year-long course for freshmen in the College of Arts and Sciences; seven years later, IH was required of all Temple freshmen. Like most other general education programs in the humanities, it is chronologically organized, Western in emphasis, and uses only "excellent, time-tested works." Each section of the course is taught by one faculty member, with no common lectures. Unfortunately, administration support for IH has declined over the years, and Temple's recent emphasis has been on satisfying a perceived student demand for career-related courses. Thus, the university's initial commitment to have 80 percent of all IH sections taught by permanent members of the faculty has been attenuated to the point that 80 percent of the sections are taught by part-time and adjunct faculty.

Tradition and Criticism in Western Culture, a four-course sequence for freshmen and sophomores at the University of the South that was created in 1992, offers an alternative way of fulfilling several distribution requirements and enrolls around one-fourth of the student body. Its four semester-long courses are "Ancient World," "Medieval World," "Early Modern World," and "Modern World." Each course is taught by a four-member faculty team drawn from the humanities departments, including the fine arts. Although traditional Christian writings constitute an important part of the syllabus, so does explicit attention to issues of feminism, multiculturalism, moral relativism, deconstruction, race, and gender.

Hendrix College created Western Intellectual Traditions in 1993 as a year-long course that all freshmen must take. Primary texts, including works of music and art, are used, along with a faculty-published book that contains introductory essays, time lines, and other aids to study. Several so-called "Big Questions" (for example, What is a good person? What is beauty and why is it important?) animate the program, which proceeds chronologically through four major periods in Western history. Each unit includes a major non-Western culture with which the West was interacting at that time.

Stanford University's Area One Program, called Introduction to the Humanities, or IHUM, could as easily be grouped with the older programs as with the younger ones. For

many years, Stanford required that all freshmen take a year-long, multidisciplinary Western civilization course. In 1988, in a move that enflamed many conservatives around the country, Stanford replaced Western Civ with Cultures, Ideas, and Values (CIV), a variety of courses that "confront[ed] issues relating to class, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation." CIV's replacement by IHUM in 1997 marked a change less in content than in pedagogy, with a new emphasis on disciplinary tools and methods. IHUM requires all freshmen to choose two courses. The fall term courses are taught by at least two faculty lecturers from different departments, whose task is to compare the ways in which each of their disciplines approaches several identical works. The winter and spring terms courses are more departmental. They must be organized chronologically and cover a span of at least two centuries. Postdoctoral fellows lead the discussion sections in all IHUM classes.

Issues Confronting the Programs

Although most of the general education programs in the humanities chronicled in this book appear to be thriving, all confront difficult issues. Some of these issues involve people, notably students, faculty, and administrators. Others involve curriculum, such as the prominence of sacred works on the syllabus, the place of non-Western studies, and the inclusion of music, art, and other nonwritten works. Still others are issues of pedagogy: What use can be profitably made of computer-based educational technologies? What is the proper balance between breadth and depth of coverage? between expert and broad-gauged teaching?

Student and Alumni Response

General education programs in the humanities consist of courses that students must take, either as an explicit requirement or as one means of meeting a set of distribution requirements. The great majority of these students do not plan careers or even majors in the humanities. Not surprisingly, many resent being required to take the courses and are convinced that the humanities will be of no value in their preparation for a career. Once enrolled, a large number of them find the primary texts to be difficult and overwhelming ("I have yet to meet the dynamo for whom this program was intended," one King's student lamented) and the lectures to be "boring."

Most humanities programs use a variety of methods to solicit student assessments of their experience in these courses. Multiple choice-style course evaluation forms are standard, and focus groups are widely used. At Rhodes, the best students in first-year Search are invited at year's end to join the Search Advisory Council and critique the course. Each section of the Foundation Year Programme at King's elects a student to discuss the program with the director. Millsaps provides Heritage students with a suggestion box.

Surprisingly, perhaps, these evaluation instruments find students' opinions of their experience in humanities programs to be generally positive. They like the small discussion sections. They enjoy the esprit de corps that develops from sharing a common experience with many, and sometimes all, of their fellow undergraduates. As they become accustomed to studying primary texts, they revel in their ability to read and discuss great books. Most students, for example, have read Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" in high school. But, Stephen Zelnick observes, at Temple, "One of the delights of the second course of the IH sequence is to teach King's 'Letter' and to show students how King himself made excellent use of his own 'IH' education ... the Greeks, the Scriptures, the natural rights tradition, and Gandhi."

Several programs have found that the more students know about the humanities requirement before they matriculate, the more likely they are to embrace their experience. At St. John's, Rhodes, Columbia, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the information that prospective students receive from admissions offices and commercial college guides tends to herald these institutions' programs. In contrast, when the University of the South did a poor job informing incoming freshmen about Tradition and Criticism during the early years of the program, writes Brown Patterson, "Many students seemed to feel that they were guinea pigs in an ill-designed experiment." Since then, entering students have been amply informed in advance about what to expect in Tradition and Criticism, with significant and positive effects on their opinion of the program.

Alumni memories of their general education courses in the humanities tend to be uniformly positive--so much so that, as at Columbia, the alumni can be fiercely protective of the program when changes are discussed. Lloyd Chapin offers two reasons that Eckerd alumni ("especially those who have been out several years") remember their experience so fondly: the link that the courses provide "to their classmates, to the faculty, and to other generations of alumni" and the realization, as they grow older, that "the texts and themes of these courses are often the texts and themes that are central to their lives." Katherine Trow's interviews of alumni of Berkeley's Experimental College Program uncovered an interesting gender difference in their assessments of the program's effects. Women appreciated the process of learning fostered by the program, especially the small group discussions and tutorials. Men were more likely to remember the content of the program--the ideas that had stayed with them through the years.

Faculty Recruitment and Retention

The generally positive response of students to their experience in humanities programs is hard won. It depends to a great extent on the quality of the teaching they receive. Yet except at St. John's, no program is staffed entirely, or even substantially, by its own faculty. Instead, the faculty for these nondisciplinary programs must be recruited from the ranks of each college's discipline-based departments. Recruiting talented and committed teachers may be the greatest challenge that humanities programs face.

With rare exception, faculty members cite the opportunity to work with colleagues from other disciplines as one of the great satisfactions of participating in a humanities program. The Lit. Hum. staff at Columbia, for example, meets every Monday to discuss the text being taught that week. "Unlike any other university event," reports James Mirollo, "instructors of different rank and experience can talk with each other about books without departmental pressure." Other programs gather their faculty for summer workshops, which often include studying a work or an author in common as well as planning for the year to come. "But the most important consequence of bringing the faculty together for an extended period of time," writes Michael Nelson about Rhodes's annual Douglass Seminar, "may be the renewing of social and intellectual bonds, along with the initiation of new instructors into the collegial norms of the course."

A related pleasure for discipline-based faculty members is the opportunity to improve their own education. Participation in the Millsaps Heritage Program allowed him to "continue with the unfinished business of being educated," wrote one faculty participant quoted by Charles Sallis. As Hendrix's John Churchill notes, to teach in a humanities program involves a willingness to say, "'I, from philosophy, am willing to lead students in discussions of Greek statuary and seventeenth-century opera,' or 'I, from the music department, am willing to teach Plato and Descartes.'" Churchill also contends that to "read and reread the same texts annually over a period of years, sharing them with a body

of students who are always the same age," is "an important part of my own self-discovery."

Yet teaching outside one's discipline is a terrifying prospect to many faculty members. It requires that "faculty become students themselves," writes Zelnick, "and until they have taught the course several times, they will feel out of their depth." However satisfying it may be to master unfamiliar works from unfamiliar disciplines, much of the time spent doing so is time diverted from making progress in one's own discipline. At Davidson, Brian Shaw found, "junior faculty already teaching in Humes or contemplating joining it harbored real concerns about the adverse consequences of participation for their scholarly productivity and professional security. Teaching outside their normal competence in such a time-consuming enterprise did little, after all, to enhance their status in an increasingly precarious job market."

A further obstacle to teaching in a humanities program may be the attitudes of a faculty member's departmental colleagues. At Temple, as at several other colleges, every student in IH is regarded by the departments as a student not enrolled in their introductory survey courses. Faculty critics at Columbia disdain the core curriculum as superficial, nonexpertly taught, a distraction from the department-based majors, and Eurocentric. The humanities programs at Rhodes and the University of the South were nearly smothered in their cradles by departments that resented having members of their faculty siphoned off.

Most colleges have developed ways to strengthen the appeal of teaching in humanities programs. These begin with faculty hiring. Unless the chair of the program is involved in the interviewing process and candidates for positions in individual humanities departments are told that general education courses are part of the job, then teaching in the program may well be regarded as an unfairly imposed burden. At Eckerd, "announcements of faculty positions include a reference to 'willingness to participate in the college's values-oriented interdisciplinary general education program,'" notes Chapin, and "search committees weigh heavily the thoughtfulness and enthusiasm of each candidate's response." Tangible support from the institution to help instructors make up for time away from the discipline is also important: a reduction in teaching load, an additional semester leave, a summer stipend, and, most important, favorable attention from academic administrators when tenure and promotion decisions are made. Less tangible support from program colleagues is also helpful. The IH program at Temple, for example, operates a faculty listserv that, according to Zelnick, "allows experienced and newer faculty to discuss problems in understanding the books and in teaching them." Finally, a certain degree of instructor autonomy in course design may make participation in the program more appealing. Rhodes's Search course follows a common syllabus for the first year, but instructors in the second year of the course are granted considerable flexibility in deciding which works to assign.

Curriculum

The curricula of all the general education humanities programs represented in this book share several common elements: a chronological organization spanning many centuries, the assignment of primary texts from several genres (for example, poetry, philosophy, history), and a strong emphasis on the Western tradition. Previously neglected works of distinction by women have entered the reading lists of every program, along with greater attention to female characters and concerns in traditional works.

The programs' approaches to other curricular matters are more varied. Should music and art be woven into the curriculum? Should the Bible and other sacred works be included?

Should the curriculum be broadened to include non-Western texts?

Music and Art

In 1945-46, the first year that Rhodes offered its Search course, music and art were an important part of the syllabus. In 1946-47, they were not. The Search faculty decided to abandon music and art for two reasons. First, although historians were reasonably comfortable teaching the Bible and philosophers were willing to teach epic poetry, few faculty members felt they had the technical training to teach music and art. Second, the faculty felt that it was all they and their students could do to meet the demands of a syllabus already crowded with important written texts.

A number of programs have followed the word-centered Rhodes approach to humanities education, and for essentially the same reasons. Two--Columbia and the University of North Carolina at Asheville--have adopted what might be called a "Rhodes-plus" approach: a main group of courses centered on written texts, and one or two additional required courses on music and art. Still others, such as King's and Millsaps, bring in faculty from the music and art departments to lecture on these subjects in the main course.

The programs at Stanford, Hendrix, and the University of the South do not attempt to cover the entire sweep of Western history. For this reason, they have more time in their courses to give sustained treatment to the art and music of the periods their students study. Each of these programs has taken advantage of the breathing room that a noncomprehensive program allows.

Sacred Works

"The Bible appears on the syllabus alongside other books," writes Churchill about Hendrix's Western Intellectual Traditions program. "But as everyone who has tried it knows, it is difficult to approach the Bible as one among the books." For students who view the Bible as the revealed word of God, "their capacity to read the text and to ask what it means in a scholarly setting is occluded by a reverential trance." Other students, "disabled by scorn, ... are certain that everything in the Bible is either rank superstition or manipulative lie."

In part because students find it so hard to discuss biblical works in a scholarly way and in part because of the primacy assigned to reason over revelation by early great books advocates such as Hutchins and Adler, the Bible was a late entry to Columbia's core curriculum. Mirollo's comparison of the 1937-38 and 1986-87 Lit. Hum. reading lists reveals no books from the Bible on the earlier list and five--Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Matthew, and Romans--on the later one. (By his count, eight other books from the Bible have been on the syllabus at various times.) The faculty finally realized, he writes, that "the course is essentially about tradition and response, and that the Bible constitutes one of those traditions, without which a good deal of the [reading] list, especially the postclassical works, makes little sense." The challenge of discussing the Bible in the face of students' preconceptions is simply a challenge that instructors must meet. Zelnick writes of Temple's program, "Most students know some of these [biblical] materials, but in a juvenile way. The aim in IH is to present the biblical materials as worthy of mature study."

Many programs have arrived at the same place as Columbia and Temple in their treatment of the Bible, but from a different direction. At church-related colleges such as Rhodes, Eckerd, and Davidson, the original humanities programs were infused with a

strongly Christian ethos, primarily that of liberal Protestantism. The Bible has always featured prominently in these programs, and it still does. But as the colleges' broader curricula have grown more secular, so has their approach to biblical study. In addition, several of the humanities programs at both secular and church-related colleges have come to include sacred works from other traditions in their courses, such as the Qur'an, the West African Sundiata, and a variety of Eastern writings.

Non-Western Content

Nearly every program that was established before the 1990s was exclusively Western, and around half still are. At Columbia, Rhodes, St. John's, Davidson, Berkeley, and King's--all of whose programs originated more than a quarter of a century ago--virtually every assigned work on the syllabus is Western in origin. The other older programs, although still predominantly Western, recently have woven in Asian, African, and Latin American materials to one degree or another. Some of the name changes in these programs capture the spirit of this modification. Millsaps's Cultural Heritage of the West program is now Heritage of the West in a World Perspective, for example, and Eckerd's Western Heritage program has become Western Heritage in a Global Context. The programs created in the 1990s at Hendrix, Stanford, and the University of the South were all designed to include at least some non-Western works.

Programs that have remained Western have not done so mindlessly. Students need to understand their own cultural traditions, these programs' advocates argue; indeed one cannot adequately appreciate other traditions unless one is firmly grounded in one's own. Further, the philosophy, literature, history, religion, art, and music of the West are so extensive and varied as to require all the time and attention--indeed, quite a bit more time and attention--than humanities programs usually have. Faculty members, already stretched far beyond their professional training in a multidisciplinary Western course, would be impossibly burdened if they had to master the diverse and extensive cultural traditions of the East and South. Finally, with the exception of St. John's, where the entire four-year curriculum is Western, students are urged or even required to take non-Western courses offered by the departments. As Margaret Heller writes of the King's Foundation Year Programme, "We always need to say to ourselves, 'It's only a first-year course!'"

Other programs argue that one cannot understand the Western, much less the human, experience in a purely Western course. For one thing, through most of its history, the West has been defined in part by its encounters with non-Western civilizations. Thus, to study ancient Greece apart from Persia, or medieval Europe apart from Islam, is to study them inadequately. In addition, some familiarity with other cultures can give students an additional vantage point from which to understand their own. Reading the Sundiata, for example, helps Temple students "to think about 'Western,'" argues Zelnick. "A list might include the objectification of nature, demystification (even in a prescientific time), literacy (Sundiata is defiantly antiliteracy), and the authority of justice distinct from mere power. Sometimes one discovers more looking in from outside the windows than from the view inside a familiar room."

Pedagogy

Universal agreement exists among the programs represented in this book about several pedagogical issues. Even in programs that are heavy with lectures, small group discussions are regarded as the setting in which the most important teaching and learning take place. Instructors in the Rhodes Search course, for example, believe that each student's personal "search for values" is as important a part of the program as the West's

historical search for values. The latter search may be facilitated by occasional lectures, but the former requires extensive time for discussion. In addition, all of the programs last at least one year and are offered primarily to freshmen and sophomores. The rationale seems to be not only that students will benefit from taking general education courses in the humanities before entering their majors, but also that they are more likely to appreciate these courses during the early years of college than the later ones. The exception in this regard may demonstrate the rule. Eckerd's required capstone humanities course for seniors, Quest for Meaning, is resisted by some students who, according to Chapin, "are at the stage in their education when they want to focus on their individual interests and enjoy maximum freedom."

Other pedagogical questions are more disputed. Among the most difficult issues that programs are currently dealing with is a new one--the use of computer-based educational technologies--and a perennial one--how to strike the right balances between competing educational goods.

Computers

"As with almost all new technologies," writes Nelson, "the advantages computers offer are instantly apparent, the costs subtle and hard to discern." Several programs now operate web sites, although more for the purpose of making syllabi, lecture outlines, and some other course materials available electronically than to give students access to additional resources. Several programs also have created listservs for each course so that students can pose questions or offer opinions to their classmates and instructors on-line. Temple, whose IH faculty is so large and far-flung as to make regular meetings difficult, operates a listserv in which instructors can seek advice from their colleagues about teaching difficult works.

Although enthusiasm for electronic pedagogy is the norm among humanities programs, it is far from universal. One expects humanists to be sensitive to the hidden consequences of technological change, and some are. "In Foundation Year," writes Heller, "the book, the human voice, and face-to-face teaching are still central, and there is a strong aversion to any suggestion of accessing texts through the Internet, [or] of submitting and responding to papers via computer." (Indeed, the King's program's recent decision to provide lecturers with a microphone was controversial.) The language tutorial at St. John's resists the use of electronic dictionaries, Mera Flaumenhaft suggests, because "the laborious investigation of words in the lexicon, and the time-consuming generation of multiple translations seem more conducive to the speculative, communal learning of the language class." Concerning listservs, Nelson is concerned that students may be "encouraged to think that transmitting messages from the solitude of their terminals [is] an adequate substitute for joining discussion in the company of their fellows." He also worries that "electronic bells and whistles" may distract students from "the hard work of reading and thinking deeply about serious and complex works and expressing themselves in intelligent, evidence-based arguments."

Trade-offs

General educational programs in the humanities inevitably involve trade-offs between competing goals, all of which are meritorious. The age-old depth versus breadth controversy is perhaps the most familiar dilemma. Given the hundreds of works worth studying, is it better to sample many of them--hoping that a few will stick in students' minds but risking that none will--or to study a few of them at length, with all the dangers of narrowness of perspective that a short reading list entails? What about the competing claims of coherence and comprehensiveness? Organizing a program around certain big

questions, as at Hendrix, or along a narrative line, as at King's, helps students to put the many pieces of a general education program together, but what about the pieces that are left out simply because they do not fit the theme?

The competing claims of the generalist and the expert vex several of the programs examined in this book. General education requires that faculty members teach outside their training: no one has graduate degrees in literature, classics, religion, history, philosophy, and politics. In doing so, instructors model for their students the idea that the good life encompasses lifelong learning, which does not end with the receiving of academic credentials. The concerns and questions of generalists may also be closer to those of students than the concerns and questions of their expert colleagues. At Rhodes, for example, members of the Search faculty were discouraged for many years from lecturing in their discipline, for fear that the aspects of a work that would interest them might be far removed from those that students needed to hear about. Yet one can readily understand the frustration of discipline-based departments on these issues. Davidson's religion department, for example, recently requested that Humes students not be granted credit toward the college's graduation requirement in religion.

The list of trade-offs is hardly a short one. Should the syllabus of a general education course be the same for all sections, or should instructors be granted a certain measure of individual autonomy? The latter approach would please instructors more, but would it excessively dilute the benefit that students derive from participating in a common experience? Should students remain in the same discussion section all year, maximizing the possibility that mutual trust and community will develop, or should they be rotated from instructor to instructor so that they will be exposed to different approaches? Many of the assigned works in a humanities program deal with issues that are important to students. How much time should be spent discussing the assigned works in a scholarly way, and how much opportunity should students have to engage the material personally?

Conclusion

The reading list for literary scholar John Erskine's General Honors seminar at Columbia consisted of sixty great books from the Western tradition--a book a week for two academic years. Because, in Erskine's view, the mark of these books was that they continued to speak to successive generations of readers centuries after they had been written, no textbooks or other secondary readings were used. Because the books would shed light on the students' own lives (or so Erskine hoped), the class would discuss them, not hear lectures from the professor. And because the books were universally illuminating, leadership of the class would not rotate from specialist to specialist in literature, the classics, philosophy, and so on, but would remain with one instructor, an amateur in the best sense of the word, who would be the students' fellow seeker as well as their guide in the search for truth and meaning.

Contemporary visitors to almost any of the humanities programs chronicled in this book would notice some differences from the Erskine seminars of nearly a century ago. Works by women and issues of concern to women are much more likely to be discussed. (The same is true of works by non-Westerners.) A more critical stance toward the works might well characterize the discussion. The term great books would less likely be used, in favor of time-tested works or enduring texts. Music might be heard, or art viewed. References might be made to downloading a reading or a lecture outline from the Internet.

Yet Erskine's seminars were the roots from which modern general education programs in the humanities have grown, and even today, the branch has not grown so far from the tree as to be unrecognizable. Students still gather around seminar tables in the courses

that constitute these programs, and they do so for more than one semester. They still read and discuss primary texts, many of them the same works that Erskine's students read and discussed. Discussions are still led by professors who, most of the time, are teaching outside their specialty. Most important, perhaps, students continue to find these programs to be crucibles in which the beliefs and attitudes that will shape their lives are forged.